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ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	DS-00	EB-00	UTED-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	LAB-01	L-00	NSAE-00	OIC-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00
	PER-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	STR-00	TRSE-00	FMP-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00
	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W				

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2520
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS GABORONE 001426

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/S FOR MUNCY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV BC SAN CKGR

SUBJECT: TENSIONS HIGH BETWEEN GOB AND FIRST PEOPLE OF THE
KALAHARI

REFERENCE: GABORONE 1228

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Tensions between the GOB and the First People of the Kalahari (FPK) have reached a new high with the arrest of 21 individuals trying to force entry through a closed gate into the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) on September 24. Government officials reportedly had followed and harassed FPK members and American activists traveling with them outside the Reserve earlier that week. The Government also reversed its practice of granting FPK permits to use radios within the Reserve or to enter the park at all on the grounds that FPK abused these privileges to encourage illegal acts, namely poaching and resettling within the CKGR. In remarks at Ambassador Canavan's presentation of credentials and in subsequent conversations, the GOB has signaled its continued defensiveness on this issue and wariness of external intervention. END SUMMARY.

FPK LEADERS ARRESTED

2. (U) On September 24, FPK leader Roy Sesana, his associate Jumanda Gakelebone, and 19 other individuals were arrested outside New Xade while trying to force entry through a closed gate into the CKGR. The group had conducted a peaceful protest undisturbed but was taken into custody when they tried to enter the park, which is temporarily closed due to an outbreak of disease. On September 27, the Ghanzi Senior Magistrate released the accused on bail pending a trial scheduled to begin on October 25.

3. (U) Earlier that week, a group of Americans led by Gloria Steinem who had been on safari within the Reserve complained of having been followed and harassed by Government officials. Department of Wildlife and National Parks staff drove into their camp at 4:00 am, asked if they were "having meetings," and said that the officers were checking up on the visitors on orders of the Office of the President. The group had sought an appointment with Government officials but assent to their request came too late to make the necessary arrangements before they left Botswana.

OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE IN CKGR

4. (U) This incident followed reports of an outbreak of violence within the CKGR earlier that month. During the week of September 5, DWNP officials approached the compound of some suspected poachers within the Reserve. According to the Special Advisor to the President, Sidney Pilane, when the officials tried to search for evidence they were attacked by a group of 11 women and 5 children with sticks and spears, who also tried to set fire to a Government vehicle. The officials left after one was injured and later more officers were sent to arrest the assailants. FPK claimed that DWNP officials had actually started the violence and injured the residents, not the reverse.

GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN ON FPK

5. (SBU) Mr. Pilane told PolOffs in an October 3 meeting that the Government had refused to grant FPK permission to enter the park (reftel) because it had been abusing that privilege to promote illegal acts, i.e. resettling in the

Reserve and poaching. Pilane conceded that the Government had previously allowed the FPK into the Park but had determined in July this year that this was no longer warranted.

16. (SBU) Mr. Pilane offered the same explanation for the decision not to renew radio licenses held by the FPK. He explained that Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) previously had granted these licenses without consulting other Government agencies, as required by regulation. When the Office of the President realized this, Pilane stated, they advised the BTA that it opposed issuance of the licenses because the radios would be used to facilitate poaching and resettling within the Reserve. BTA's CEO directed press inquiries on this subject to the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

GOVERNMENT SET TO REMOVE ANIMALS

17. (U) As reported in reftel, Mr. Pilane sent a team into the CKGR in early July to observe conditions there and question returned residents. The group found evidence of highly contagious sarcoptic mange among domestic stock. This led to the quarantining of domestic animals within the

Reserve and closure of most of the park to visitors. According to Alice Mogwe, Director of human rights group Ditshwanelo, which is working with some of the relocated San, witnesses not sympathetic to the Government had confirmed that the disease was indeed afflicting livestock there.

18. (U) After any quarantined livestock were found healthy, owners were given 14 days to remove them from the Reserve. Mr. Pilane told PolOffs that since none of the residents had taken their livestock out of the Reserve, the Government would begin doing so.

HEARINGS ADJOURN AGAIN

19. (U) On September 15, the High Court approved an application to adjourn hearings in the CKGR relocation case until February 6, 2006, to allow the applicants time to raise additional money to fund the suit. Earlier in the week, the two sides had reached an agreement that enabled the state to significantly shorten its list of witnesses by allowing some to provide written testimony. Despite this compromise, applicants' attorney Mr. Bennett told the court that without an adjournment, his clients likely would have to withdraw their case. Despite the objections of State attorney Sidney Pilane, the judges granted the applicants a second adjournment to raise funds.

PRESIDENT MOGAE DEFENSIVE ON CKGR

110. (SBU) As reported on the front page of the state-owned Daily News, President Mogae, in his remarks to Ambassador at her presentation of credentials, said Botswana's "homegrown" democracy does not deny the benefits of development to any population group "even under the pretext of preserving their culture." He urged the Ambassador to visit remote areas herself to get a "more balanced understanding of the situation there than is afforded by a handful of special interest groups." (FYI: The Office of Protocol had requested and received an advance copy of the Ambassador's initial credentials presentation speech, which referred to this issue. Embassy later shortened the speech due to time constraints. Embassy believes there was nothing "unbalanced" in the original draft remarks. End FYI.)

111. (U) The draft speech sent to the MFA had said: quote We would encourage Botswana to assure that all groups within the country, especially those in remote areas, can easily access the basic material necessities of life. It may not be easy to increase their educational, economic, and other opportunities that will raise their living standards while also preserving their distinctive cultures and languages. We also encourage you to be open to those with alternative views on how to do this, because it is through debate and dialogue that win-win solutions can be achieved. Botswana is not alone in facing such a challenge; we too have had to deal with this issue. The U.S. is already giving financial assistance to projects that serve these remote area dwellers, and we remain committed to assisting you and these groups and peoples in the difficult task of improving their conditions. end quote

112. (SBU) That same day, the privately-owned daily Mmegi editorialized against the government's relocation policies, criticizing them as unnecessarily weakening Botswana's international standing. During an October 3 conversation with PolOff, Press Secretary to the President Jeff Ramsay and Special Advisor to the President Sidney Pilane expressed the Government's unwillingness to negotiate on this issue at all. The Government would consult with the FPK only if it

dropped its legal charges, they said. Ramsay scoffed at calls by Ditshwanelo to begin a dialog between the Government and the persons relocated from the CKGR, suggesting that Ditshwanelo is no longer involved in the issue. Pilane stressed that the Government would not consult with any external group and expressed his hope that the U.S. was not allowing itself to be drawn into the matter.

COMMENT

13. (SBU) The fact that FPK won a second adjournment to raise funds and that its members were granted bail, both over the objections of Government attorneys, demonstrates that they continue to receive fair treatment from Botswana's judiciary. On the other hand, recent events seem to have hardened the Government's resolve to enforce its policy of removing all residents from the Reserve, and to use the

fullest possible range of pressures to compel compliance.

14. (SBU) Although Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Pilane acknowledged that international opinion is important to Botswana's national interests, it was clear that both are committed to a 'stay-the-course' approach to the relocation issue. Beyond the technical and legal aspects of the case, both officials referred to Botswana's "sovereign right" to make its own decisions about the relocations, and both were particularly critical of British government and media pressures. As President Mogae's remarks to the Ambassador indicate, the Government continues to be hypersensitive to any references to or questions about its relocation policy. The Mission will continue to reach out to Government officials who see value in rethinking this policy and its implementation, and to stress the importance to Botswana of maintaining its strong record and image of respect for human rights.

CANAVAN

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